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# A Methodological and Theological Evaluation of Jon L. Dybdahl's Theology of Spirituality

Elvis-Silviu Dumitru

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ABSTRACT

A METHODOLOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL  
EVALUATION OF JON L. DYBDAHL'S  
THEOLOGY OF SPIRITUALITY

by

Elvis-Silviu Dumitru

Adviser: Zoltán Szallós-Farkas

## ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Thesis

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A METHODOLOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF JON L. DYBDAHL'S THEOLOGY OF SPIRITUALITY

Name of the researcher: Elvis-Silviu Dumitru

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Zoltán Szallós-Farkas, PhD

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### Problem

The concept of spirituality has become popular in recent years among both Christians and non-Christians. The meaning of this term has evolved from biblical times to the present, and today we can come across many types of spirituality. Even in the Adventist Church this concept is understood differently. Ellen White emphasizes that we can correctly represent the character of Christ only by being spiritual, and unfortunately, there are a lot of people who are not spiritual. One of the most influential Adventist theologians concerned with this subject is Jon L. Dybdahl, which highlights the benefits of all types of spirituality. In the present study, we will identify the biblical vision of spirituality and compare it with Dybdahl's theology of spirituality.

## Method

To understand the biblical spirituality we will do an exegetical study of this term, analyzing the meaning of the word in Scripture and we will observe how its meaning has changed throughout history. We will also carefully examine Dybdahl's theology of spirituality highlighting the premises, presuppositions and the methodology which Jon L. Dybdahl used in his study and also the implications that it has on developing Seventh-day Adventist spirituality.

## Results

After the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of spirituality began to be popular in Western Europe and then in many parts of the world. Today we can come across several types of spirituality and a variety of understandings of this concept. This research indicates that authentic spirituality is based on three principles/pillars that are (a) *Solus Deus* - The only God; (b) *Sola Scriptura* - Scripture alone; (c) *Sola Fide* - Faith alone. These principles are essential to reach Bible-sound spirituality, because it reveals that man does not have to let his culture, temper or personal preferences to influence his spirituality, but through faith in the Scripture and the influence of the Holy Spirit, the Subject (man) have to discover the Object (God) and become like Him.

## Conclusions

This study indicates that Bible-based spirituality involves a strong relationship with the Triune God who is relived in Scriptures and a life continuously influenced and transformed by the Holy Spirit. Authentic Spirituality cannot be reached only by practicing certain rituals, but it implies both theoretical (hermeneutical/the knowledge about God) and practical (relationship/knowledge of God) side.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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EVALUATION OF JON L. DYBDAHL'S  
THEOLOGY OF SPIRITUALITY

A Thesis  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

by  
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2018

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APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

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Zoltán Szallós-Farkas, Ph.D.  
Adviser

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Laurențiu F. Moț, Ph.D.

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Date approved

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
SDA	Seventh-day Adventist
LXX	Septuagint

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Problem**

Spirituality is a common term nowadays because we find this term in many of scholars' writings who say that people are hungry for God<sup>1</sup> and spirituality. The development of this trend began specifically in Western Europe. Later the concept became popular in other parts of the world, embracing different shades. The concept includes several types of spirituality such as Christian spirituality, Oriental spirituality, Post-modern spirituality etc., and each of these facets offer benefits to those who choose to practice them. On her part, Ellen White emphasizes the importance of spirituality and claims that we cannot correctly represent the character of Christ without spirituality, and unfortunately, “there are many who lack spirituality.”<sup>2</sup>

Given the importance of genuine spirituality and the diversity of interpretations encountered today, it is crucial for all Christians, regardless of denomination to understand how the Bible defines this concept.

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<sup>1</sup> Jon L. Dybdahl, *Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of Your Soul* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald 2008), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Hagerstown, Maryland: Review and Herald, 1993), 126.

## **Importance of the Research**

The notion of spirituality has changed its meaning over time and with this change, the concept has extended its interpretations. People who want to become spiritual are confused by the different types of spirituality they encounter in the present. The importance of this study is that it attempts to critically evaluate the concept of spirituality that we find in nowadays and compares it with the biblical understanding of spirituality. The study also aims to highlight the implications that biblical spirituality might have on Christianity (especially on Adventism) today. Given the fact that spirituality was and still is understood differently, it is important to reach a credible conclusion and to analyze this term without letting its religious background influence our conclusion. By correctly identifying the biblical sense of spirituality, we will better understand the role of spiritual growth in the lives of believers.

## **Premises**

The first premise with which we begin this study is that the Bible has enough evidence to prove the existence of the Trinity. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to demonstrate the existence of the Trinity, which is a *sine qua non* of Christianity. This premise is crucial in defining Christian spirituality.

The second premise is that the Bible is the only authority and criterion upon which we can interpret spirituality. To correctly interpret this subject, we need a pillar on which to relate. Therefore, the principle of *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) is important when researching this subject, the Bible being God's revelation to us.

The third premise is that *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres* (Scripture is its own interpreter) never contradicts itself. In our study we will notice that the word *pneumatikos* is understood differently by the different writers of the Bible. This does

not undermine the authority of the Bible, but it only completes it, and we have to dig deep to see what the writers want to transmit. Exegetically, we know that even if a word has most of its occurrences in a certain sense, this does not mean that the same word cannot have a different meaning in another section of Scripture.

### **Purpose of the Research**

The main purpose of this study is to identify authentic spirituality as presented by the Bible and to describe in detail the historical trends that have influenced the meaning of this concept. In this process, we will analyze its developments over time and we will examine the past and present meaning of the concept of “spirituality”. Once we discover the Biblical view of spirituality, we will then try to critically evaluate and assess Jon L. Dybdahl’s theology of spirituality as it has been presented in his book, entitled, *Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of Your Soul*. The assessment and evaluation will be done in the light of our findings, in terms of a biblical understanding of spirituality.

Another purpose of this thesis is to observe the implications the concept of spirituality might have for the lives of contemporary Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) believers, in particular.

### **Methodology**

In order to reach a correct understanding of the concept of spirituality, we will carefully investigate the evolution of this concept from biblical times to the present. In the main block after the introduction, the study will be divided into three main sections. The first section of this study (Chapter 2) will be an exegetical study of *pneumatikos* (spiritual), analyzing the meaning of the word wherever it appears in the entire Scripture. As a first step, this chapter will be discussing the evolution of this

term in history, and how its meaning has changed under the influence of trends in different times. A second phase of this chapter will identify the evolution and significance with which this term is used in the Bible.

A methodological analysis of Dybdahl's spirituality will form the second section. In this part of the paper (Chapter 3) we will try to identify premises and presuppositions from which Jon L. Dybdahl begins his study and the methodology he uses to define spirituality.

The last section (Chapter 4) will focus on the criticism of the theology of Jon L. Dybdahl. In this part of the paper we will attempt to identify the concept of spirituality in relationship with the Trinity and the implications that Dybdahl's theology has on developing SDA spirituality.

### **Delimitations and Literature**

On the topic of spirituality there are many books and articles that have been written. Many theologians have expressed their opinions regarding this concept, and some religions consider spirituality as the foundation of their faith. Due to the limited size of this study and its precise purpose, we will not take into consideration all views on the symbolism of spirituality, but we will analyze only the opinions of the theologian Jon L. Dybdahl, and the Biblical view of this subject.

In our attempt to identify what spirituality is, we will conduct an exegetical study, limiting our analysis only to the words that have a direct connection with the subject. We will also try to analyze the meaning of these words by seeking their appearances both in the New Testament (NT) and in the Old Testament (OT). In our research we will usually use New King James Version, and when we use another Bible version, we will mention it in the footnote.

Regarding the bibliography used in the development of this study, we will attempt to cover the widest possible range of books, relying mainly on Christian commentators, but we will also use other aids that can help us to have an objective picture about the subject.

As it was mentioned above, we will approach this research on the concept of spirituality, in a critical manner, as presented by Jon L. Dybdahl in his book *Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of Your Soul*. In order to observe if the notion of spirituality suggested by Dybdahl is biblical, we will first look in the Bible, but we will also refer to other books that have approached this topic over time.

Due to the fact that the purpose of this research is to analyze spirituality from a biblical perspective, one of the books we are going to consult is *A Search for God* by Zoltán Szallós-Farkas because this book analyzes spirituality from a general point of view and the Adventist Spirituality from the apocalyptic perspective. The biblical foundation of this book will help us shape an authentic view of spirituality and the author's experience in this field will outline an appropriate method to reach this goal.

Another intention of this research is to observe the initial meaning of spirituality and the evolution of this concept over time. For this, we will consult the book *Spirituality and History* by Philip Sheldrake that approached spirituality from the historical perspective analyzing the transformation of its meaning from Biblical times to nowadays.

We will also use the book *Creation, Evolution and Theology: The Role of Method in Theological Accommodation* by Fernando Canale to portray a correct methodology in identifying biblical spirituality, and also to highlight Jon L. Dybdahl's methodology applied on this subject.

Although, the books mentioned above will stay at the foundation of our research, we will also consult many other writings and articles that can help us structure a biblical view of spirituality.



## CHAPTER 2

### SPIRITUALITY IN HISTORY AND SCRIPTURE

#### Introduction

Spirituality is a very common term nowadays. This concept is used both by Christians and secular people, and it manifests differently in their lives. Theologians speak of several types of spirituality, such as Christian spirituality (which consists of many branches: Catholic spirituality, Methodist spirituality<sup>1</sup>, Evangelist spirituality, Adventist spirituality<sup>2</sup> etc.), New Age spirituality<sup>3</sup>, Post-Modern spirituality etc.. Nevertheless, only a few people can provide a concrete definition of this term. Most, argue that it is an abstract concept that has to do with the mind, soul and spirit which therefore cannot be defined. Contrary to these arguments, Philip Sheldrake says that “Spirituality, as an area of study, must be capable of definition. If it has no conceptual limits, effectively it means nothing.”<sup>4</sup>

We can easily see that people are longing for spirituality and want to experience it in their lives, even if they understand the concept differently. However,

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon S. Wakefield, *Methodist Spirituality* (Peterborough, United Kingdom: Epworth Press, 1999), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Zoltán Szallós-Farkas, *The Rise and Development of Seventh-Day Adventist Spirituality* (Cernica, Romania: Editura Institutului Teologic Adventist, 2005), 301.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997), 7.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History* (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 40.

this concept raises a number of questions: How do we define spirituality? How can we experience genuine spirituality? What benefits brings spirituality to a man's life?

If one speaks of Christian spirituality, they can see that most believers understand spirituality depending on how they perceive God. A convincing argument is made by Zoltán Szallós-Farkas when he talks about how Plato, Aristotle or Deists understand God.<sup>5</sup> They perceive God as distant and limited, understanding spirituality only as an idea or concept, excluding the role of experience in spiritual development. The mosaic understanding of spirituality is the result of how we understand God.

To understand and correctly define spirituality, we need some pillars from which to relate. We need to bring to the forefront the premises with which we began this paper: God is a Trinitarian God, *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) and *Scriptura sui ipsius interpret* (Scripture is its own interpreter). These three principles are the foundation of hermeneutics, and also formed the basis of Luther's reform. Therefore, I consider it is necessary to use them as a benchmark as we try to define the term of spirituality.

Based on the assumptions above, in this chapter we will generally analyze the concept of spirituality historically, but more specifically, we will analyze this term exegetically.

### **Analysis of the Term Spirituality in History**

Even though "spirituality is a term much in vogue"<sup>6</sup> nowadays, the accounts of its history show us that the term entered later, both in theological and secular writings.

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<sup>5</sup> Zoltán Szallós-Farkas, *A Search for God- Understanding Apocalyptic Spirituality* (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Universitară, 2010), 20.

<sup>6</sup> Wakefield, *Methodist Spirituality*, 15.

Actually, this Latin noun *spiritualitas* (spirituality) “did not make its appearance until the fifth century”<sup>7</sup>. It began to be popular in France after the 17th century, and in English, it has been widely used since after 1920.<sup>8</sup> Comparing *The Catholic Encyclopedia* published between 1912-1915 with *New Catholic Encyclopedia* published in 1970, Sheldrake notes “in the first there are no references to spirituality, while in the second there are eight articles that employs the word.”<sup>9</sup> If we look at the origin of the concept of spirituality, we can see that it is rooted in the Greek word *pneumatikos* (spiritual), used especially in Pauline writings. Even though the word *pneumatikos* is derived from the word *pneuma* (Holy Spirit), it is interesting that Paul does not use this term to describe an intangible reality, but to describe something visible, for example a man who is transformed, influenced or led by the Holy Spirit.<sup>10</sup>

Studying the writings of the church fathers, we can see that they kept the significance of spirituality as it is presented in the Pauline writings. Augustine, one of the most prominent of the church fathers, believes that the spiritual life of a man is closely related to the understanding that he has on the Trinity. Augustine’s life was influenced by this concept. The theologian Michael Downey emphasizes the holistic image that Augustine had about spirituality, saying: “Augustine spirituality has intellectual, moral, sacramental, mystical and apostolically dimensions.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, 42.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Downey, *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Minneapolis, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 931.

<sup>9</sup> Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, 42.

<sup>10</sup> Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality*, 60.

<sup>11</sup> Downey, *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 66.

Throughout time, the meanings of *pneuma* / *pneumatikos* differed, and were influenced by trends that dominated that period. For example, in Aristotelian philosophy, “it was approaching the meaning held by *psyche* (soul)”<sup>12</sup>, supporters of this trend, claiming that *pneuma* refers to a “formative power”<sup>13</sup> that turned a person from a child in a mature man and then, in case of man, became a tool through the soul to control the body. In the stoic philosophy, this concept was carried forward and the term *pneuma* took over the functions of *psyche* in relation to the sense and to thought and speech. Sometimes it was identified, by some Stoics philosophers, with “*nous*” (the specifically human power for intellect).<sup>14</sup> Looking at the semantic evolution of this term, we can observe that these interpretations were not close to the original meaning which Paul gave to *pneuma*. If spirituality, in Paul’s vision, described a man led by the Spirit, over time it developed multiple interpretations. Most theologians talk about the 12th century as a turning point in understanding spirituality. In this century, it has developed a new philosophical trend in theology called scholasticism, where “*spiritualitas* began to be opposed to *corporalitas* (corporeality) and *materialitas* (materiality).”<sup>15</sup> This trend has resulted in radical conceptions, and his supporters believed that spirituality means detachment and total disregard for the body and matter. Thus *pneuma* / *pneumatikos* has become an intangible reality, referring specifically to the soul and intellect. In this period of strong development of scholastics, these trends were kept in balance by the philosopher and theologian

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<sup>12</sup> Brown Colin, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3 (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), 689.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Downey, *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 931.

Thomas Aquinas who used both scholastic and Pauline interpretations simultaneously.<sup>16</sup>

The 17th century brings an unexpected evolution for the concept of spirituality. This term has become increasingly popular and has been used both in the Christian and secular writings. Works such as *Manuel de spiritualite* (1917), *La spiritualite Catholique* (1918-1928)<sup>17</sup> show us that the popularity of this term began to increase in France, and then it spread and developed in other countries too. Even during this period the psychological meaning of spirituality focusing only on the inner life of man was emphasized, an important step that helped many people to embrace the concept. In the following centuries, spirituality took a more practical form. It became associated with spiritual disciplines (prayer, fasting, meditation etc.) and practicing doctrines in everyday life.

History shows a mosaic of understanding of spirituality. Over time, people have used different words to express spirituality. For example, “*devotion* was the word used by Francis de Sales.”<sup>18</sup> In John Wesley, spiritual theology was based on *perfection*. He believed that the purpose of the Christian life must be sinless perfection, which is a consequence of love for God.<sup>19</sup> For the Evangelical, *piety* is the key word that describes spirituality.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Antonia Fitzpatrick, *Thomas Aquinas on Bodily Identity* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2017), 19-21.

<sup>17</sup> Downey, *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 931.

<sup>18</sup> Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, 43.

<sup>19</sup> Wakefield, *Methodist Spirituality*, 24.

<sup>20</sup> James Gordon, *Evangelical Spirituality- From the Wesleys to John Stott* (London, United Kingdom: The Longdunn Press, 1991), 169.

With such a wide variety of interpretations, it is hard even for an honest seeker to discover which is the true form of spirituality. Since the purpose of this thesis is to provide a biblical understanding of spirituality, in this chapter we will try to go to the origins and make an exegesis of the term spirituality and reveal how this concept is understood in the sacred writings of Scripture.

### **Spirituality in Scripture**

We have seen, in previous chapters, the importance of spirituality throughout history. To discover authentic spirituality, we must find out how the Bible pictures this concept. As we noticed above, spirituality is rooted in the Pauline writings, and has developed into different forms over time. However, God definitely had spiritual people before Paul's existence. Therefore, in the following section we will try to uncover how spirituality was manifested from Genesis to Revelation.

#### **Spirituality in the Old Testament**

In the OT, the word *rūaḥ* (wind) is most often used as the equivalent of the Greek word *pneuma* (especially in Septuagint [LXX]), and the second word used is *neshāmāh* (breath) which appears even in the first chapters of the Bible that talk about the creation of man (Gen 2:7). Albert Barnes [1834] considers the word *neshāmāh* (the breath of life that God breathed into man's nostrils) as what represents the mental part of mankind. The word *neshāmāh* is invariably applied to God or man, never to any irrational creature.<sup>21</sup> In Masoretic Text the word *rūaḥ* is also often used as the equivalent of *pneuma* (often it refers expressly to the *spirit* of God)<sup>22</sup>, but to a lesser

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<sup>21</sup> Albert Barnes, "Barnes' Notes," accessed 14 December, 2016.  
<http://biblehub.com/commentaries/barnes/genesis/2.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> Horst Balz, *Exegetical Dictionary of The New Testament*, vol. 3 (Berrien Springs, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 118.

extent than in the LXX. “Of the 377 instances of *rūah* in the Masoretic Text, 264 are translated as *pneuma*, the next most frequent rendering being *anemos* (wind), used 49 times.”<sup>23</sup>

It is interesting that in many of the instances in which the term *rūah* appears something extraordinary happens. Some theologians emphasize that as the wind (*rūah*), although it is invisible and intangible, can have devastating effects, as the spirit (the metaphorical meaning of *rūah*)<sup>24</sup>, though is not visible, its effects in human life may be real. For example, in Genesis 8:1, the presence of *rūah* has devastating effects. When God looked upon the world He had created and saw the moral degradation of the people, He made a wind to pass over the earth, and it was almost entirely destroyed. Also, Psalm 51:10 we can see in David’s prayer that he understood that in order to change his life, he needs a new heart and a new spirit. The presence of *rūah* offers the needed revival and reformation of life.

Ezekiel 37:10 is another example where we can see the effects of *rūah*. In his vision, Ezekiel receives the mission to invoke the power of the Spirit (*rūah*) for the dead people to rise again. Lange J. Peter affirms in his commentary that “the Spirit of God is the principle of all real life in the creaturely existence.”<sup>25</sup> This statement is very important because we can deduct from it that a person, being connected with *rūah*, is sent at the time of creation, that begins with the Spirit of God walking the

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<sup>23</sup> Colin, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 690.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> John Peter Lange, "Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical ", accessed 16 December, 2016. <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/lange/ezekiel/37.htm>.

face of the waters (Gen 1:2). To get in touch with the Spirit of God means to come into contact with the Trinity.

Szallós-Farkas highlights the importance of the relationship with God in terms of spirituality saying that Christian spirituality (Biblical Spirituality) deals with the complex dimensions of the lived experience of the cognitive relationship between God and man.<sup>26</sup> “The spirituality of the Old Testament is based on the relationship between creature and Creator. The strongest point of the spirituality of Adam and Eve before the Fall was “knowledge through interaction.”<sup>27</sup> Ellen White says that before falling in sin, Adam enjoyed a free communion with the Creator, but after the fall he lost that privilege.<sup>28</sup>

Although many people believe that spirituality is a concept that belongs to the NT, we can also find a holistic picture of spirituality in the OT.

Three words define this concept in the OT: heart, soul and strength (the latter being replaced in the NT by mind (Mat. 22:37). In Deuteronomy 6:5, when Moses demands total submission to God of Israel, he uses these words. The same words are used about Josiah when the Bible says: “Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses” (2 Kings 23:25). God does not accept a partial spirituality. Total *surrender* and *obedience* are two words that express the relationship between humanity and divinity.<sup>29</sup> The Bible tells us that there were moments in the

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<sup>26</sup> Szallós-Farkas, *A Search for God- Understanding Apocalyptic Spirituality*, 57.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ellen White, *Tragedia Veacurilor* (Bucharest, Romania: Viață și Sănătate, 1996).

<sup>29</sup> Joseph Kidder, *Majesty- Experiencing Authentic Worship* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2009), 31.



history of Israel, when people honored God with their mouths, but their heart was far from Him (Isaiah 29:13). These examples show that spirituality is a holistic concept that is present in the OT, and that is based on the relationship with the Trinity. A partial spirituality is condemned by God.

### Spirituality in the New Testament

In the NT, the concept of spirituality can be more easily defined. The Apostle Paul brings forward the term *pneumatikos* (spiritual), using it often in contrast with the word *sarkinos* (fleshly). In 1 Cor 3:1, Paul rebuked the Corinthians because they were not spiritual people, but earth-bound. Misinterpreting this contrast, used by Paul, many people, later on during the history of the Christian church, thought that being spiritual means to detach oneself completely from worldly things<sup>30</sup>, embracing the current so called asceticism. This stream neglected in fact the practical side of spirituality, and it aimed to keep the mind clean through detachment from the world. Although this trend was in vogue in the time of the early church (today it is still also being embraced by some people), this trend is contrary to the vision of Jesus. In John 17:15 Jesus prayed to the Father: “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world.” C. K. Barrett (comparing 1 Corinthians 2 verse 14 with verse 6) argues that the significance of *pneumatikos* (spiritual) in verse 14 is the same as *teleios* (mature) from a verse 6 and sustains that *pneumatikos* does not refer to those who are separated from material life by the practice of asceticism, but to those who have received, and have their existence determined by the Spirit of God.”<sup>31</sup> So Paul did not condemn

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<sup>30</sup> Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History*, 42-43.

<sup>31</sup> C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on The First Epistle to The Corinthians* (New York, NY: Harper&Row Publishers, 1917), 78-79.

material things, on which any man in this world depends, but condemns worldly things that encroach on or lead a Christian life astray. To emphasize the spiritual immaturity of the Corinthians, Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 3:1 the term *nēpiois en Christō* (babies in Christ). They are called this because “they demonstrate the incapacity for spiritual things.”<sup>32</sup>

We can easily see Paul’s concern for the spirituality of the church. To discover the meaning of the word *pneumatikos*, we must first analyze the words and terms that the apostle Paul uses in his writings and which can help us better understand the meaning of *pneumaikos*. First, we will analyze the word *psychē* (soul, life), then, we will look at two terms that Paul uses in contrast: *psychikos* (sensual) and *sarkinos* (fleshly).

*Psychē* is a term used in the Greek culture to illustrate the most precious part of the human being and we see it 900 times in LXX and 101 times in NT.<sup>33</sup> The original meaning of the term is impersonal, being the equivalent of the Hebrew word *neshāmāh* translated as the breath of life. Later it is interpreted as the life force, the principle of human knowledge, soul, mind, person, emotion, etc.<sup>34</sup> In Mark 8:36, Jesus describes this word as being more precious than the whole world. By comparing the latter biblical text with Matthew 16:25, we notice the word is translated both soul and life. “*Psychē* is thus [is] intimately associated with the concept of selfhood and of that life that has eternal value.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Robertson Nicoll, *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 785.

<sup>33</sup> Colin, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 679-82.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 676.

<sup>35</sup> Downey, *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, 909.

Paul uses this word with both the primary meaning of life (Acts 20:10, when he revives Eutychus) and the natural/carnal meaning to describe the sinful nature of man. In 1 Corinthians 15:45, Paul uses the term *psychen* to illustrate the carnal nature of man by assigning it to Adam, and in the same time, he puts it in contrast to *pneumatikos*, which he uses as a heavenly attribute of Christ. “Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual (1 Corinthians 15:46).”

We can assume from the foregoing, that the psyche has several connotations. The theologian Colin Brown brings forward the top three most common meanings he used: “(a) *Psychē* in the sense of impersonal basis of life, life itself; (b) the inward part of a man; (c) an independent soul, in contrast to the body.”<sup>36</sup>

Another term that appears in the NT, especially in the writings of the apostle Paul is *psychikos*. Lenski affirms that the meaning the apostle uses in his writings does not illustrate human nobility, but rather with the word *sarkinos* he describes man “as a being who is under the dominion of sin.”<sup>37</sup> For example, in 1 Corinthians 2:14, *psychikosis* is used as a synonym for *sarkinos* to describe people who reject the things of the Spirit, because they are “carnal” and the things of the Spirit are “foolishness” to them.<sup>38</sup> Both of these terms are in contrast with *pneumatikos* - spiritual. In his attempt to show the contrast between these terms, but also their importance for the advancement of the gospel, the apostle apparently contradicts himself. On the one

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<sup>36</sup>Colin, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 677.

<sup>37</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpreting of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthian* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), 114.

<sup>38</sup>Fee D. Gordon, *The New International Comentary on The New Testament- The First Epistle to The Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 116.

hand, he states in Galatians 5:17 that all that is earthly (the work of the flesh or the desire of the flesh) is against the Spirit and the believer can no longer live in the flesh because he has “crucified the flesh” (Gal 5:24). On the other hand, he states that although he was crucified with the Christ (and Christ lives in him), he still lives in the flesh (Gal. 2:20). This shows that in Paul’s view, although *sarkinos* and *psychikos* are contrary to spirituality, they are part of man. He does not promote the detachment of body or earthly things, as some religions claim, but it shows us that spirituality and the connection with Christ affects the whole being of man. This perspective is in agreement with biblical truths as Christ declares in His prayer to the Father not to take the disciples out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one (John 17:15).

Paul also often uses the term *sarx*, not only in a figurative sense (as we saw above), but also on its own. In Romans 1:3, he assigns this term to Christ to illustrate the relationship He has with David, according to the flesh, and also to prove that “Israel after the flesh” is represented by people who descend from patriarchs (1 Corinthians 10:18).<sup>39</sup> We can understand from the above idea that this term is not used only in a negative sense, but the context determines the connotation of the term.

Paul contrasts *pneumatikos* with *sarx*, *psychikos* and *psyche* only to emphasize worldly concern to the Christians of his time, but we must consider that both *sarx* and *psyche* are compulsory elements of spirituality. *Sarx*, *psychikos* and *psyche* are ways through which spirituality is manifested in our lives.

For Paul, as mentioned earlier, spirituality does not consist of detaching from the worldly things or body, but rather a human desire to be led by Holy Spirit. Spirituality has practical connotations in the NT, emphasizing the effects that The

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<sup>39</sup> Colin, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 675.

Holy Spirit has in the life of man. To be led by the Holy Spirit, it is necessary to relate and experience Him in your life, this work being achieved gradually in a man's life. Jesus said in John 17:3 that eternal life means getting to know God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), that is to develop a relationship with Him. The relationship with the Trinity and practical experience are a *sine qua non* in spirituality.

Jesus Christ presents a holistic picture of Christian spirituality and the need for total involvement in experiencing an authentic relationship with God. To experience a genuine spirituality implies to love God with all your heart, soul and mind (Mark 12:30).

While secular (non-Christian) spirituality tries to clear the mind and detach the man (subject) of the surrounding world, the biblical view of spirituality affirms that the purpose of Christian spirituality is to fill the mind, heart and soul with God's presence.<sup>40</sup> Thus, spirituality includes the theoretically called theological knowledge (knowing *about* God), and also the experiential, which is the knowledge *of* God.<sup>41</sup>

### **Preliminary Conclusions**

Throughout time, spirituality has been a complex term that has been understood in different ways. We can see this in the various types of spirituality found today. We meet today with oriental spirituality, Christian spirituality or even occult spirituality. To discover true spirituality, we must understand the purpose of each type of spirituality that exists. We have seen in this chapter that the purpose of non-Christian spirituality is to clear the mind and detach man of the surrounding world, while, according to the Bible, the purpose of Christian spirituality is to fill the mind,

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<sup>40</sup> Richard Foster, *Discipline Spirituale* (Cluj-Napoca, Romania: Discipolul, 2008), 32.

<sup>41</sup> Szallós-Farkas, *A Search for God- Understanding Apocalyptic Spirituality*, 45.

heart and soul with God's presence. Biblical spirituality does not separate *pneuma* from *sarx* (flesh) or *psyche* (soul/mind), which is necessary in spirituality, but it is against attaching to them while neglecting dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Experiencing God's presence can be achieved only through a relationship with God and a continual knowledge of the Object (God). Spirituality depends upon the human understanding of the Trinity.

The Bible presents a holistic picture of spirituality in both the Old and NTs. It shows us that the presence of *pneuma/rūah* brings dramatic changes in the lives of those who come into contact with it. A spiritual man is influenced by the Spirit and the effects of the Spirit or its fruits are visible. To be influenced by the Holy Spirit requires knowledge and a progressive experience of the Object, that is, the biblical God.

## CHAPTER 3

### A METHODOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF DYBDAHL'S THOUGHT ON SPIRITUALITY

#### **Introduction**

The concept of spirituality has been understood differently over the time. Many theologians and philosophers have written about this concept, and many religions, both Christian and non-Christian, are based on this concept. To understand how a person or a religion defines this term, it is important to analyze the doctrine and beliefs that are behind this concept.

Due to the fact that in Adventist spirituality, Jon L. Dybdahl is considered to be one of the most representative personalities who have approached this subject, we will try to identify in the next chapters the principles he highlighted and to analyze them from the biblical perspective. As we mentioned above, Dybdahl is a member of the SDA Church, who worked as a pastor and evangelist in Thailand where he had a great involvement in setting up an adult education center and Chiangmai Adventist Academy. He later became president of the Walla Walla University in Washington, a position he left in 2006. He is known as one of the SDA Church experts in the global mission and spirituality being the author of several mission and spirituality books such as *Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of Your Soul*, *Missions: A Two-Way Street*, *Adventist Mission in the 21st Century*, *Passport to Mission* etc..

Therefore, it is important to introduce this methodological study in this paper in which we try to understand the concept of spirituality as in Dybdahl's vision. In

this chapter we will try to identify the premises from which the author begins his work, his worldview and the doctrines that form the foundation of his ideas.

### **Dybdahl's Premises**

In order to have an authentic study, any researcher must identify the correct premises for the beginning of a study. In the first part of this chapter, we will try to identify and analyze the premises from which Jon L. Dybdahl begins his work.

The main premise of the author's book that we find right at the beginning of it is that every man has in his soul, a strong hunger for God. "Even if suppressed and denied, it cries out silently from the depths."<sup>1</sup> This statement is supported by many theologians and it has foundation even in the Holy Scriptures. The book of Ecclesiastes says that God "has put eternity in their hearts," and Jeremiah says that God will put "His law in their minds, and write it on their hearts." That means that human beings have inside of them the sense of morality and the need for being a perfect person.

The second premise on which the author begins his research is inferred from his arguments that all types of spirituality are good and beneficial to humans. In this regard, Dybdahl appreciates Eastern religions as they see spirituality as something practical and experiential, in comparison to Christianity that understands spirituality as a philosophical idea.<sup>2</sup> This idea can be seen as a benefit for Christian spirituality, by highlighting the lack of practical experience in the lives of the believers. In his book "Christian Spirituality", Alister McGrath presents several theological definitions

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<sup>1</sup> Dybdahl, *Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of Your Soul*, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 14.



of spirituality, and he unanimously shows spirituality as a “lived experience.”<sup>3</sup>

Practical exercises are part of spirituality without which it cannot exist.

Although this assumption is correct in its essence, the way that the author continues the argument is unsound in terms of methodology. The author emphasizes only the practical side of spirituality and completely neglects the theoretical side. That problem of methodology (which we will discuss in detail in this chapter) persists in Jon Dybdahl’s book.

On the one hand, this idea can lead to a false result because Dybdahl applies non-Christian spirituality rules to religious matters. For example: we cannot apply the rules of handball in football, and expect great results. In oriental spirituality, anyone who practices specific spiritual exercises (meditation, yoga, etc.) will get to experience the benefits of Eastern spirituality, but in regard to Christian spirituality it does not apply; not everyone who practices the specific spiritual disciplines (prayer, fasting, meditation) will come automatically to be spiritual. That is because Christian Spirituality deals both with the complex dimensions of the lived experience which has to be the result of that knowledge of the biblical God which is engendered both by research and search for God. That is, the God of Scriptures, who is radically different from Eastern deities, comes to be known as the God whom the researcher finds revealed in the Scriptures. The latter is approached by means of a scientifically rigorous theological research that should equally be a genuine search for God on the part of the researcher, the theologian or lay person, for that matter. From the aforementioned, we understand that one cannot apply the same method of research and study both to Eastern and Christian spirituality.

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<sup>3</sup> McGrath E. Alister, *Christian Spirituality* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing, 1999), 4.

On the other hand, emphasizing only the practical side of spirituality can lead to a divorce between spirituality and theology.<sup>4</sup> Spirituality and theology are so closely related that some theologians have said that “spirituality is that part of theology which deals with Christian perfection and the ways that lead to it,”<sup>5</sup> and a divorce between those “may have many-faceted implications for both doing and teaching Theology.”<sup>6</sup> Such a divorce can lead to a distorted picture of God and we can make the same mistake made by the great ancient philosophers when they stressed only the theoretical side of spirituality. To reach an accurate picture of God we must start from the Bible (the theoretical), and this will influence human spirituality (the practice).

The theologian Alister McGrath, points out that Christianity is based on three essential elements: a set of beliefs/doctrines, a set of values and a way of life.<sup>7</sup> The first two elements of McGrath are rooted in the Bible (Text), from which doctrines and values are derived, and the last element, the way of life, is influenced by the first two.

In his thesis, Zoltán Szallós-Farkas speaks of *An Adequate Method* and points out that “in the very process of research, the cognitive human Self, the theologian, is confronted with different categories of statement found in the Text (Bible).”<sup>8</sup>

According to the opinions of these two scholars, the main pillar that must build

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<sup>4</sup> Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology* (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 33.

<sup>5</sup> Rowan Williams, *Sacraments of the New Society* (London, United Kingdom: SPCK, 1996), 89.

<sup>6</sup> Szallós-Farkas, *A Search for God- Understanding Apocalyptic Spirituality*, 56.

<sup>7</sup> Alister, *Christian Spirituality*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Szallós-Farkas, *A Search for God- Understanding Apocalyptic Spirituality*, 29.

Christian spirituality must be the Bible (*Sola Scriptura*). Only by starting from this premise and by adopting this methodology we can reach a fair result.

Another premise from which Dybdahl begins his research is that the foundation of Christianity should be a communion with God. This can both meet men's longing for God and also allow men to enjoy God's longing for fellowship with them.<sup>9</sup> Analyzing how the author understands spirituality in this book, it results that this communion with God can be gained/improved by practicing the specific spiritual exercises. Also, the Bible and personal experience are a part of the foundation of this book, as the author often supports his statements with Bible passages.

### **Influences in Dybdahl's Vision of Spirituality**

#### **Eastern Influences**

One of the main features of Dybdahl's writings is that he sees everything from a practical perspective. We can see this by looking at his books, which analyze Christianity from the perspective of the mission that he received (therefore almost all his books talk about mission). For example, in his book *Passport to Mission*, he says that "missionaries are a lot like soldiers. They need to know certain practical things. [...]Missionaries must learn to practice the nuts and bolts of getting along, communicating, and remaining healthy in another culture."<sup>10</sup> From this quote we can see the author's desire to emphasize the practice of Christianity. However, as we said above, the author tends to neglect the theoretical side of Christianity; even more, he appreciates the spirituality of Eastern religions because they understand religion much

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<sup>9</sup> Dybdahl, *Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of Your Soul*, 19.

<sup>10</sup> Jon L. Dybdahl, *Passport to Mission* (Berrien Springs, MI: Institute of World Mission, 1999), 19.

more as a devotional and spiritual experience than as a philosophy or idea, and the author concludes that this is the reason why many Christians feel a hunger for God- because “their very definition of what religion is cuts them off from the source of spiritual life – communion with God!”<sup>11</sup> The vision brought forward by Jon Dybdahl is an interesting one, but inadequate in terms of methodology. The thing that the author loses sight of is that behind the Eastern spirituality is a philosophy that cannot be embraced by Bible-based Christianity. Therefore, these two types of spirituality could not be compared.

For example, while Christianity and Hinduism have much in common (Hinduism is an open religion with a tolerance for new concepts)<sup>12</sup>, however, they have a totally different background. Like Christianity, Hinduism has its foundation in a spiritual belief in an Absolute. For Hinduism this Absolute is *Brahman*, the only true reality, the first source of all forms of the cosmos. Eastern spirituality is based on practicing religious rituals, and knowledge found in *Veda* (Word) which is also called the Revelation because it emanated from the *Absolute* (Brahman) at the beginning of the world.<sup>13</sup> Although these two trends appear to be very similar, they have at least two fundamental ideas that distinguish them.

First, the Hindu religion has its foundations in philosophical pantheistic idea. This idea was also supported by the great Prussian philosopher Hegel, and promotes the idea that God is present in everything in nature and that everything in the universe is part of Divinity.<sup>14</sup> God is present even in man, and for a man to discover the divinity

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<sup>11</sup> Dybdahl, *Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of Your Soul*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> Jean Delumeau, *Religiile Lumii* (Bucharest, Romania: Humanitas, 1996), 360.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>14</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Crestinism, Pur si Simplu* (Bucharest, Romania: Humanitas, 2004), 58-59.

within him, he must be released of all that is human. The advocates of this idea are guided and helped by a master (*Guru*) to conquer full inner knowledge and discover the *Brahman* (the divinity) in the depths of the self.<sup>15</sup> This concept leads to the idea that man is part of the divine, and to discover the inner divinity, he has to defeat the human side. This can only be achieved through specific practices that separate man from the world and empty its own personality and individuality. A similar idea is met in the Buddhist religion in which one of the usual acts that they fulfill for the union with the divine is getting in a sort of meditation that reaches its peak (*samadhi*) at some point. The person involved in this ritual is sitting on the ground and in front of him there is an object to which he focuses to enter in trance.<sup>16</sup> The concept of soul detachment from the physical body is an idea often seen even in these days. Therefore many believe that spirituality has to do with the mind and consists in separating it from the body.<sup>17</sup> Richard Foster emphasizes this as saying that “Eastern meditation is an attempt to empty the mind”<sup>18</sup>, followed by loss of personality and individuality, while the goal of Christian meditation is filling the mind. Christian spirituality is not intended to detach the human being from the world, but to help the person living better in it and urges them to do everything possible to make it better.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Giovanni Filoramo, *Manual de istorie a religiilor* (Bucharest, Romania: Humanitas, 2004), 267.

<sup>16</sup> Niniam Smart, *The Religious Experience* (Mahwah, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 70.

<sup>17</sup> Norman L. Gulley, *Systematic Theology- Prolegomena* (Barrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 17.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (New York, NY: Harper&Row Publisher, 1978), 15.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

Also Buddhism, which Charles Eliot says is extremely mixed with Hinduism<sup>20</sup>, states that the purpose of religious practice is to release this world, and this can only be achieved by controlling the mind and physique through yoga; the devotion to divinity and meditation (*Nirvana*) led to reunion of *Individual Ego* (atman) with *Absolute Principle (brahman)*.<sup>21</sup> A similar idea is also supported by Islam, though it embraces an opposite idea to the pantheism, arguing that man has no *Divine paternity*. However, it says that before God, man had no personality and the only purpose of man was to fulfill his mandatory ritual imposed by Islamic Law (*arkanad-din*).<sup>22</sup> Following these statements, we can see that although Eastern and Christian religions are similar in some aspects, they hide some crucial differences in the background and they do not allow us to compare them in terms of spirituality.

Secondly, it is important to observe why people who join an Eastern religion chose to practice their specific spiritual rituals. Both Christianity and Eastern religions have certain spiritual practices or rituals, and many of them are similar. Prayer, meditation, fasting or offerings are just some of them. What is the difference between Christian spirituality and Oriental? Can these two be compared? For example, Jon Dybdahl says that he practices the breath prayer and recommends it as a good way of prayer that can bring spiritual benefits.<sup>23</sup> Even though he is aware that this type of prayer is specific to non-Christian religions, he argues that a method can be considered Christian if “the content and text are Christian.”<sup>24</sup> The thing we must

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<sup>20</sup> Charles Eliot, *Hinduism and Budism*, vol. 3 (London, United Kingdom: Broadway House, 1921), 43.

<sup>21</sup> Delumeau, *Religiile Lumii*, 436.

<sup>22</sup> Dominique Sourdel, *Islamul* (Bucharest, Romania: Humanitas, 1993), 63.

<sup>23</sup> Dybdahl, *Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of Your Soul*, 52.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

consider is that we cannot become spiritual by using biblically unsound ideas and practices. However, even if certain practices were similar, the motivation of fulfillment of these rituals is totally different in these religions.

The main reason the Eastern religions practice spiritual exercises is to subdue the gods. According to religious leaders, the happy or unhappy fate of a man depends directly on thorough celebration rituals.<sup>25</sup> The religious ritual system is focused on sacrifice, and the gods are invited to come before the altar of sacrifice to receive the offerings. The reason why these rituals are fulfilled is to subjugate the gods.<sup>26</sup> Thus, both human and social prosperity depend on proper and complete fulfillment of rituals that are supervised by a religious leader called a *Guru*. To better illustrate this image we refer to the period before the Vedic period, when Hindu believers offered sacrifices to various gods such as: “Agni (the god of fire and sacrifice), Indra (the sky-god and god of war), Varuna (the upholder of cosmic order).”<sup>27</sup>

Another reason why the believers accomplish these spiritual rituals is civic duty. As we mentioned above, Eastern religions have a well-developed social side advocating for peace, nonviolence and order. Mahatma Gandhi, one of the great representatives of Hinduism had a great impact over the masses by promoting his asceticism and his moral values. He “stands for the ethical dimension of Indian religion aimed at a reform of the social dimension.”<sup>28</sup> It is interesting that although he promoted peace and free will, he also defined Hinduism as a *varnashramadharma*,

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<sup>25</sup> Philippe Gaudin, *Marile Religii* (Bucharest, Romania: Editura Orizonturi, 1995), 358.

<sup>26</sup> Filoramo, *Manual de istorie a religiilor*, 263.

<sup>27</sup> William B. Eerdmans, *Eerman's Hamdbook to The World's Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 184.

<sup>28</sup> Smart, *The Religious Experience*, 112.

which means an order of things (*dharma*), mandatory for all Hindus because of their adherence to the caste system (*varna*) and their state of life (*ashram*).<sup>29</sup> Eastern religions promote harmony between Divine nature and society, emphasizing the duty of all people to fulfill their rituals and to make the necessary sacrifices for the good of the universe. “People have the duty to contribute, by rites, maintaining the universal order.”<sup>30</sup>

Besides rituals, believers of the Eastern religions get used to going on pilgrimages to sacred places. These pilgrimages begin the rituals of separation including shaving heads, wearing special clothes and leaving the area where they live for a while. These pilgrimages are seen as true spiritual revivals.<sup>31</sup>

We can affirm that Eastern religions contain many great and noble principles, but this does not mean that their spirituality is safe and sound, and this is because when judged from a biblical point of view, the macro-hermeneutical conditions,<sup>32</sup> that

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<sup>29</sup> Gaudin, *Marile Religii*, 335.

<sup>30</sup> Filoramo, *Manual de istorie a religiilor*, 266.

<sup>31</sup> Theodore M. Ludwig, *The Sacred Paths* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995), 120.

<sup>32</sup> Fernando Canale argues that both scientific and theological methodology must assume a *priori* hermeneutical condition. The hermeneutical condition refers to the assumptions/ presuppositions that the scientist or the theologian must assume when interpreting the results of their studies. Canale analyzes the hermeneutical condition in three dimensions (micro, meso and macro), and each of them represents a phase in the theological knowledge. To exemplify these phases of cognition, Canale states that biblical principles of interpretation represent micro-hermeneutics, theological principles of interpretation represent meso-hermeneutics and ontological, epistemological, and articulation principles represent macro-hermeneutics. Fernando defines the macro-hermeneutical condition based on Immanuel Kant's ideology, which assumes that any concept or notion is organized around three central ideas: human nature, the world, and God. This principle named by Kant as “regulative” was partly taken over and applied in theology by Fernando Canale as the macro-hermeneutical presupposition. This principle represents the vision that researchers have about “human nature, the world and God.” Depending on the assumptions that a scientist or a theologian has on these subjects, he interprets the results of future studies he does. Canale recognizes that science departs from classical Aristotelian realism. When entities are analyzed from a scientific point of view, whose sources are facts and require a “spatiotemporal understanding, classical ontology is rejected, including the notion of God and soul. Now nature and history play the macro-hermeneutical role that God once played in classical philosophy and theology.” See pp. 8; 23-27; 103-107 from Fernando Canale, *Creation, Evolution and Theology: The Role of Method in Theological Accommodation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University LithoTech, 2005).



is, the worldview, behind them are biblically incorrect. The Eastern religions only show that everyone (regardless of the religion which the person adheres to) is trying in his own way to find God. Both Christianity and Oriental religions have some spiritual rituals in common (fasting, meditation, offerings), but Christians do not do these things to appease God or by obligation, but because they respect and love God. One of the most important differences between Christian and Oriental religions is the purpose of spiritual disciplines. The fast, prayer, meditation and other spiritual disciplines are practiced in Eastern religions with the purpose of taking the believer away from this world, to empty the mind from the burdens of this world and to unify *Individual Ego (atman)* with *Absolute Principle (brahman)*.<sup>33</sup> The benefits of these practices are relational nature, of an individual nature, of liberation from everyday problems and of rediscovery of self. There are many who claim that spiritual disciplines are meant to help us to improve our relationships with “our husband or wife, our brothers or sisters, our friends or neighbors.”<sup>34</sup> The purpose of practicing spiritual discipline in Christianity is not to empty our minds and souls, but to fill ourselves with divine presence. Richard Foster states that “God has given us the Disciplines of spiritual life as a means of receiving His grace”<sup>35</sup> and for us to be transformed. If spiritual disciplines become a goal and not a way to discover God, they are just a form. Mulholland believes that “the first thing that happens if our spiritual disciplines don’t emerge from our relationship with God is that they become a form, a very subtle and destructive form, of works-righteousness. They become a

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<sup>33</sup> Delumeau, *Religiile Lumii*, 436.

<sup>34</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

means by which we either attempt to transform ourselves into the image of God or attempt to gain God's favor."<sup>36</sup>

The purpose of spiritual discipline is to discover God, not to win his favor or to free us from daily burdens. The practices that constitute the disciplines "have no value in themselves".<sup>37</sup> The aim of spirituality is not fasting, prayer, worship or others disciplines, but to link the believer with God to the point of living in a continuous dependence on Him. These may be a consequence of the relationship with Him or a way to God, and not a purpose.

The danger of making a particular ritual or practice more important than its significance is also highlighted in the Bible, when God's people have come to love the ritual of sacrifices more than their significance. In the book of the Prophet Amos, God reproached the people with an ironic message because they were idolaters, and their condition was deplorable, but still they continued to offer sacrifices and bring the tithe to the temple (Amos 4:4-5). In the NT, Christ warns the Pharisees that God is more concerned with their attitude than with rituals: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (Matt 12:7). The rituals of the sacrifices represented only a picture of the plan of salvation, and they were a way for man to come to know God and His love. A person does not become spiritual by performing the same specific rituals. Spirituality can be sound or unsound, depending on the motivation and the worldview behind it.

The goal of Eastern religions to come into contact with the divine does not prove that their spirituality is ideal, rather it reveals man's eagerness to find God; it

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<sup>36</sup> Mulholland M. Robert, *Shaped by the Word: The Power of the Scripture in Spiritual Formation* (Nashville, TN: The Upper Room, 1985), 92.

<sup>37</sup> Wilard Dallas, *The spirit of the disciplines: Understanding how God changes lives* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1991), 138.

reveals man's dissatisfaction with his life, acknowledging his sin and seeking passage into another world, where he can be free from suffering and where he finally can find rest.<sup>38</sup> Thus, concerning the ideas upon which Eastern spirituality is built, we can conclude that Dybdahl works with biblically unsustainable premises when he argues that some spiritual exercises can be useful for Christian spirituality. Although the author is aware of (and even highlights) the difference between the two types of spirituality, he says that "certainly the commitment to meditation by many Eastern religion devotees could serve as an inspiration to the Christians. Similar benefits can result from both streams."<sup>39</sup> To illustrate his idea we can use the image of an airplane and that of a submarine. Although both use propellers to move, their purpose and their results are totally different from each other. The same can be said about the two types of spirituality. The benefits of Eastern rituals are visible only socially and psychologically, but they do not have a great impact on the spiritual life. The biblical perspective of God and man must be the foundation of spirituality. Szallós-Farkas affirms that "as an academic discipline, the concept of Christian spirituality refers to the integrative removal of the divide between the experience of faith and the intellectual reflection upon it. Thus, Christian spirituality deals with the complex dimensions of the lived experience of the cognitive relationship between God and man."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> H. M. S. Richards, *Paște Oile Mele* (Bucharest, Romania: Viață și Sănătate, 2010), 19.

<sup>39</sup> Dybdahl, *Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of Your Soul*, 61.

<sup>40</sup> Szallós-Farkas, *A Search for God- Understanding Apocalyptic Spirituality*, 57.

## Liberal Influences

The book *Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of Your Soul* shows man's need of God, highlighting in particular the practical side of spirituality. The author of the book treats various spiritual disciplines such as prayer, meditation, fasting, study, worship etc., emphasizing the need of Christianity to focus more on doing than on believing. To illustrate this, Jon Dybdahl brings forward the biblical view on worship and states that the word worship (Heb: *sachah*) appears in the OT 150 times, and in most cases it means physical actions: to prostrate oneself, bowing down deeply or to do homage.<sup>41</sup> The idea presented by the author here illustrates a painful truth about some Christian denominations. Many Christians approach worship as a "doctrine to accept or believe, not an encounter experience."<sup>42</sup> However, the remark made of the author is only fifty percent true. Although he states his point of view with biblical arguments, the author faces a problem of methodology. One should not forget that the doctrines of all churches are supported by the Bible, but not all of them are true. And the main reason for that is applying wrong methodologies. Next, I will present some examples from the book *Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of Your Soul* to support my point of view.

## Cultural Subjectivity in Judging Music

Dybdahl affirms in the second chapter of his book that it does not matter what type of music a person prefers in worship. He says that any music can be beneficial for spiritual growth and we should not judge the musical preferences of individuals, because "musical tastes and preferences are always culturally and generationally

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<sup>41</sup> Dybdahl, *Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of Your Soul*, 27.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 28.

influenced.”<sup>43</sup> The idea proposed by the author reflects a certain ideology and influence that he has adopted, and this ideology is a result of a wrong methodology that the author uses to analyze spirituality. Besides that, he begins his work with an unsound hypotheses, therefore, he makes a distorted conclusion.

Firstly, the statement that it does not matter what type of music a person prefers in worship, contradicts another statement of the author, which says that in worship we are actors, and “God is the audience.”<sup>44</sup> The second statement affirms that everything we do in worship must be directed towards God, but Dybdahl’s first statement leads us to conclude that everything we do is to satisfy our own desires. He proposes that we must accept every kind of music depending on what we like and not by divine principles. “What moves my children may not touch me and vice versa.”<sup>45</sup> Dybdahl’s vision supreme principle is “I like it”, and the main character in worship is no longer God but man. If God is the audience, then the main purpose of worship should be to glorify God, and not to satisfy personal pleasure.

Secondly, the liberalism adopted by the author, does not have the Bible or the divine principles as its foundation, but human feelings. It is well known, human emotions and feelings are constantly changing, so, in order to have a correct theology, we need a pillar on which to relate, and that is only the Bible (God’s Self-revelation). This is the only pillar that we can relate to because “what His Self-revelation contains cannot be different from what the truth of God-Self is.”<sup>46</sup> Most theologians argue that

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Szallós-Farkas, *A Search for God- Understanding Apocalyptic Spirituality*, 25.

theology must be based on Scripture, and to prevent the methodological errors highlighted above, Szallos-Farkas explains by an epistemological paradigm that theological knowledge comes through the interaction between *Knower* and *Known*. This knowledge involves the study and interpretation of data and “needs to be viewed as relational because of faith being its ultimate presupposition [...]. Research, without the basic presupposition of faith tends to place the Knower above the Known.”<sup>47</sup> This is the main methodological deviation that Dybdahl makes. He places the human needs and pleasure (The Knower) above the will of God (The Known).

Because of the arguments presented above, we can say that choosing good and genuine music in worship is a very important thing and accepting all types of music can have serious consequences on people. In addition to this chapter, we will try to argue why it is dangerous to accept any type of music in worship and the effects that it has on the believers.

### **Music and Morality**

Music is an essential element in worship. Since ancient times, we can read about the role of music in people’s lives. In the Bible, when people were joyful, they sang to express gratitude towards God (Ex. 1Sam 2:1-10). Also when they had a problem, they sang to God (Ex. Psalm 51). Music is also an important part of people’s lives today. Although music has experienced tremendous evolution over the centuries, it has become a very controversial issue in the religious realm. Some Churches have tried to define and clarify “good music” for religious services of worship, and this debate about kinds of church music rages on and causes quite a dilemma. Talmage

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<sup>47</sup> Dybdahl, *Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of Your Soul*, 38.

Dean states that “throughout the history of Protestantism, the definition of the *good* has been left to each congregation, within certain theological boundaries.”<sup>48</sup> Concern for this subject has increased with the emergence of new musical types, but despite attempts to clarify this subject and despite the many books written on this topic, the “Protestantism’s management of the problem has been ineffectual.”<sup>49</sup> This dilemma has engulfed the religious world, so much that the religious leaders presented and adopted at the Second Vatican Council in 1963 the “Constitution on the sacred Liturgy”<sup>50</sup> in which they deal with the subject of sacred music.<sup>51</sup>

Music has not been an important subject only in religious but also in scientific disciplines. Over the time, scientists have investigated the influence of music on the human brain and how it can affect emotions. One of the things that they have discovered is that the human brain is divided into four lobes: frontal, temporal, parietal and occipital, and each part of the brain has different functions. The frontal lobe is associated with planning and self-control, being considered “the neuronal source of musical genius,”<sup>52</sup> the temporal lobe is associated with hearing and memory while the occipital lobe is associated with vision.<sup>53</sup> In addition we can talk about the

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<sup>48</sup> Talmage W. Dean, *A Survey of Twentieth Century Protestant Church Music in America* (Nashville, TN: Brodman Press, 1988), 258.

<sup>49</sup> Wolfgang Hans Stefani, “The Concept of God and Sacred Music Style : an Intercultural Exploration of Divine Transcendence/Immanence as a Stylistic Determinant for Worship Music with Paradigmatic Implications for the Contemporary Christian Context” (Andrews University, 1993), 10.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>51</sup> Wolfgang points in his thesis that three years after the adoption, The Liturgical Conference and the Church Music Association of America have organized a meeting called “Crisis in Church Music” where they have extensively dealt with the subject of sacred music; see pp. 11-13.

<sup>52</sup> Critchley Macdonald, *Music and the brain* (Southampton, UK: The Camelot Press, 1977), 419.

<sup>53</sup> Daniel J. Levitin, *Creierul nostru musical* (Bucharest, Romania: Humanitas, 2010), 98.

cerebellum which is involved in emotions. A unique aspect when we talk about the influences of music on the brain is that music affects all four areas of the brain, and of course, the cerebellum which is responsible for emotions.<sup>54</sup>

The influence of music on human beings is scientifically proven. Nevertheless, if we approach the subject of sacred music, we cannot only consider its impact on physical and mental health, but we must take into account the ethical and moral aspects of music. Stefani states that “the most significant flaw in the “influence of music” approach is that science tends to be made the ultimate arbiter of what constitutes acceptable music, placing scientific research in the category of inerrant truth.”<sup>55</sup>

Many believe that “music itself is without moral qualities,”<sup>56</sup> but the lyrics of the songs can give the music a beneficial or a negative influence. Dybdahl has the same opinion and he believes that it does not matter what type of music one listens to as long as it touches one's heart.<sup>57</sup> Contrary to this view, Wolfgang Stefani highlights the connection between music style and worldview, which means that the music we listen to reflects our perception of the world. He says that “during the last two centuries, the relationship between worldview and artistic style has become recognized as a significant scholarly pursuit in Western Civilization.”<sup>58</sup> The main

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>55</sup> Stefani, "The Concept of God and Sacred Music Style : an Intercultural Exploration of Divine Transcendence/Immanence as a Stylistic Determinant for Worship Music with Paradigmatic Implications for the Contemporary Christian Context," 17.

<sup>56</sup> Michael Tomlinson, "Contemporary Christian Music is Christian Music," *Ministry*, September, 1996, 26.

<sup>57</sup> Dybdahl, *Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of Your Soul*, 28.

<sup>58</sup> Stefani, "The Concept of God and Sacred Music Style : an Intercultural Exploration of Divine Transcendence/Immanence as a Stylistic Determinant for Worship Music with Paradigmatic Implications for the Contemporary Christian Context," 75.



problem in accepting every type of music in worship is that it affects human feelings and can place feelings above reason. Scientific research conducted in the last decade has determined that “music dictates feelings.”<sup>59</sup> Thus, the individual loses the ability to discern between good and evil, and will act according to the impetus of his emotions. We observe that not only the lyrics influence the listener, but also the melody. Music can convey the same emotions to all people regardless of geography, gender or culture. For example, an instrumental or jolly classical piece of music (ex: Vivaldi’s Four Seasons – Spring) will transmit positive emotions, whether it is listened to by an African, Asian or European. The reason why this happens is that the composer “draws more or less upon his entire personal and social experience.”<sup>60</sup>

In the East in the thirteenth century A.D., Japan installed a comprehensive system of principles and rules (the *Gagaku-ryo*) to control music activities in the country. The same system was also taken by India and China because they believed that music influences the character.<sup>61</sup> Music affects the human brain, and man cannot control its effects. The influence of music in some form is universal among humans, no matter the social status or race.<sup>62</sup> Speaking about the effects of music on the human brain, the rock singer Daniel J. Levintin says that while he listened to music, he felt like it held him in a trance as it led him to other sensational realms to which he had

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<sup>59</sup> Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Christian and Rock Music* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 2000).

<sup>60</sup> Stefani, "The Concept of God and Sacred Music Style : an Intercultural Exploration of Divine Transcendence/Immanence as a Stylistic Determinant for Worship Music with Paradigmatic Implications for the Contemporary Christian Context," 79.

<sup>61</sup> Bacchiocchi, *The Christian and Rock Music*, 348.

<sup>62</sup> William J. Sutton, *Ancient Prophecies about Mysticism, Hollywood and Music Industry* (Brushton, New York The Institute of Religious Knowledge, 1998), 260.

never been before. “Time seems to stand still when I listen to music.”<sup>63</sup> Music can have a tremendous influence on the human being, acting on the subconscious of the individual, without him being able to control its effects. For this reason, the principles of music selection must be well established by the individual. Aristotle and Plato considered that “music directly imitates the passions or states of the soul (gentleness, anger, courage etc.), and when one listens to music that invokes a certain passion, he becomes imbued with the same passion.”<sup>64</sup> In other words, if one listens to a good music or genre, this will help him to become a better person, but if one listens to bad music, that will influence him in a negative way. When a church uses a certain type of music in worship, the basic principle must not be just “touch my soul,” but it must be chosen according to the principles of ethics and morality found in the Bible.

### **Music and the Concept of God**

Music is a gift from God. It has great power over men, whether they are passionate about it or not. It occupies an important place in people’s lives and we meet it in every culture. Although it is present everywhere, it can “be shaped and developed according to the culture, living conditions or talents and our weaknesses as individuals.”<sup>65</sup> The great composer Howard Hanson believes that music can create different feelings in human life by bringing peace or disorder, raising or lowering one’s soul, and it has power for good as well as for bad.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Levitin, *Creierul nostrum musical*, 150.

<sup>64</sup> Donald J. Ground, *A History of Western Music*, (London, United Kingdom: Norton & Company INC, 1973), 7.

<sup>65</sup> Oliver Sacks, *Muzicofilia* (Bucharest, Romania: Humanitas, 2009), 7-8.

<sup>66</sup> Bacchiocchi, *The Christian and Rock Music*, 23.

When we talk about Christian music, it is obvious that music reflects the values and beliefs of the listener beyond the emotions that it creates in human life. Depending on the music that one prefers, it denotes “the fundamental beliefs, the worldview”<sup>67</sup> and the concept that the individual has on God. Music also highlights the composer's concept and vision of the world and of God. Stefani states that “in creating a world, the artist draws more or less upon his entire personal and social experience.”<sup>68</sup> Thus, when we look at different religions, we can see that the music they use in worship is a result of the image that the church has of God. For example, the Catholic Church uses a gloomy music in worship, and this is the result of the fact that Catholics perceive God as distant, and ready to punish sinners in purgatory. On the opposite side, certain Protestant traditions use a happy music in worship, and this is the result of the fact that they perceive Jesus as their elder brother or best friend. We can see in the above examples that “two very different conceptions of God engender two very different styles of music because what rules the heart, forms the art.”<sup>69</sup> Therefore, I consider that the main problem that needs to be solved when we talk about profane music that invaded the church, is that it is not the music itself, but a complete misunderstanding of God. It is the believer's responsibility to seek not only to have good lyrics to their songs, but also to have a musical style that expresses their biblical understanding of God.<sup>70</sup> Music is meant to glorify God, not humans.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 357.

<sup>68</sup> Stefani, "The Concept of God and Sacred Music Style : an Intercultural Exploration of Divine Transcendence/Immanence as a Stylistic Determinant for Worship Music with Paradigmatic Implications for the Contemporary Christian Context," 79.

<sup>69</sup> Bacchiocchi, *The Christian and Rock Music*, 358.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 359.

Christians have a duty not only to determine whether a song is harmonious, but also to promote biblical principles both in the text and in the melody.

### **An Adequate Method**

Most scientists regard theology as an unscientific area mostly because theologians cannot bring arguments, based on science, to validate the existence of God. Psychologist Florin Sava says that “for a theory to be validated, there is a need for instruments to allow scientific investigation to test it.”<sup>71</sup> He believes that the statement “God is the creator of the universe”<sup>72</sup> cannot be true because there are no scientific instruments to test and validate it. However, we believe that God (the Object) can be studied and its existence can be validated. As the thinking and reasoning of the scientific and philosophical schools is based on certain presuppositions,<sup>73</sup> the theological schools are also based on presuppositions that will be outlined below.

In his book “A Search for God”, Szallós-Farkas highlights five criteria that “are to be met if scientific claims are made with regard to theological knowledge and to the way it is achieved.”<sup>74</sup>

The first criterion is “faith as ultimate presupposition.”<sup>75</sup> This criterion is also called the fundamental presupposition because it states that, in order to reach the theological understanding of God, the theologian must believe in God’s intelligibility.

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<sup>71</sup> Florin A. Sava, *Psihologia Validată Științific* (Iași, Romania: Polirom, 2013), 19-20.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>73</sup> Gulley, *Systematic Theology- Prolegomena*, 158-72.

<sup>74</sup> Szallós-Farkas, *A Search for God- Understanding Apocalyptic Spirituality*, 26.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

Faith is the crucial and central premise in understanding God from the theological point of view. In this regard, we can say that “faith is the ultimate presupposition of theological knowledge.”<sup>76</sup>

Faith as ultimate presupposition leads us to the second criterion that argues that faith has to be engendered by the Object of research, God in the Scriptures. It is important to mention that faith, in the Object of one’s research (God) cannot be humanly and rationally generated by the cognitive Subject (man). So, the Trinitarian God needs to be approached by the researcher, the human cognitive Subject, via the revealed content of the Scriptures which is God’s Self-Revelation. And by doing that, the cognitive Subject of theological research allows the Object of research, the Triune God via His Word, to engender in the human cognitive Subject, the theologian, faith that is a *sine qua non* of sound theology (Rom 10:17).

The criterion above shows us that any attempt on the part of the theologian to do sound theology, that is, to get to know the Trinitarian God by natural reason, without God’s Self-Revelation in Scriptures, is futile. And this is so because without taking divine revelation seriously, the theologian stands little chance to interact with the Object of his research, the Triune God, who is another cognitive Subject by virtue of His personhood. In the final analysis, doing sound theology requires one to allow “the Object [God via the Scriptures] to generate faith [Rom 10:17] as a prerequisite of the cognitive Subject’s seeking and achieving reliable understanding of the truth of the Object [God].”<sup>77</sup> Faith is then the ultimate prerequisite in understanding God and

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 27.

it cannot be generated by finding proofs of God's existence, but by acknowledging the Object as the main Creator of the Subject.

The third criterion of the scientific claim of theological knowledge, is a non-dualist worldview. The concept of non-dualism is essential to sound theological method. Why is that? It is because dualism is defined as the existence of two antagonistic and mutually exclusive realities/entities, such as nature and supernature, God and world, soul and body, mind and matter, subject and object, phenomenon and noumenon etc. The non-dualist worldview "upholds a unified and integrated view of all reality, empirical and non-empirical,"<sup>78</sup> in which real and objective cognition is possible due to the communicational interaction between God and human beings via rigorous theological research.

The fourth criterion of adequate theological methodology, introduced by Szallós-Farkas, is objectivity in research. In order to view the method or the "end-result" from an unbiased perspective, one must take into consideration the fact that the human cognitive Subject is the creation of the divine Object of research. In other words, the human cognitive Subject, the theologian, may be objective in his research and in his attempt to formulate a thesis about the Object of theological knowledge as long as s/he allows the Object of theological knowledge (formation), that is, God in the Scriptures, to have a greater and more determinative role in engendering theological knowledge. This further means that methodological subjectivism is avoided if the theologian subjects himself/herself to the authority of God in the Scriptures

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

It is well known that in the classic understanding of objectivity, in order to have an accurate “end-result” of research, one must keep himself/herself clinically detached and independent from the object of one’s research. But such clinical detachment from one’s object of research means that one does not reckon with the fact that the human cognitive Subject’s skills are gifts secured via divine creation by God who is the Object of theological research. And this is the only reason why the human being is able to think, analyze, synthesize, compare, that is, to interpret the world around him/her. This further means that the cognitive human Subject (the theologian) achieves theological knowledge based on a certain understanding of the interpretative task, namely, interactive interpretation, so “the cognitive Subject [the theologian] interacts with the [God, who is the] Object [theological research].”<sup>79</sup>

In the light of the above criteria of adequate and sound theological methodology, we can now assess the theological methodology of Jon Dybdahl. He took over the practical elements of Eastern spirituality that is grounded in a fundamentally dualist worldview, and brought them into Christian spirituality. The purpose of spirituality is not to exercise some specific spiritual disciplines/practices, but to get to know the Trinitarian God of Scripture and to have a sound relationship with Him, a relationship that is rooted in biblically sound doctrines. So, in order to avoid dangerous spiritual practices, we must identify biblically sound doctrines that are engendered by a correct theological methodology, one that is none other than the integration of sound theological research with a genuine search for God within Scriptures.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 28.

Such an integration of research with search for God becomes obvious from the *Epistemological Paradigm* (Figure 1) presented by Zoltán Szallós-Farkas. This brings forward another element, faith, which is an essential factor of understanding the biblical text and getting to know God.<sup>80</sup> Man (the subject) must realize that the object of research is not just a “text” [the Bible], but a Person, that is, God (the Object of theological research). Through research of the Bible we can search for God (John 5:39). Thus, the Theologian (The Subject) studies the Scripture (The Revelation) and by believing what he finds in the Scripture, he discovers God (The Object), as shown in the figure below:<sup>81</sup>

In the final analysis, we cannot reach a true knowledge of God only by theoretical analysis (hermeneutics). We must also develop the experimental aspect (relationship). Both aspects are summarized by the above diagram, the theoretical and the practical side of the relationship with God. This means that both aspects, that is, sound Christian theology and sound Christian spirituality, have to be integrated within

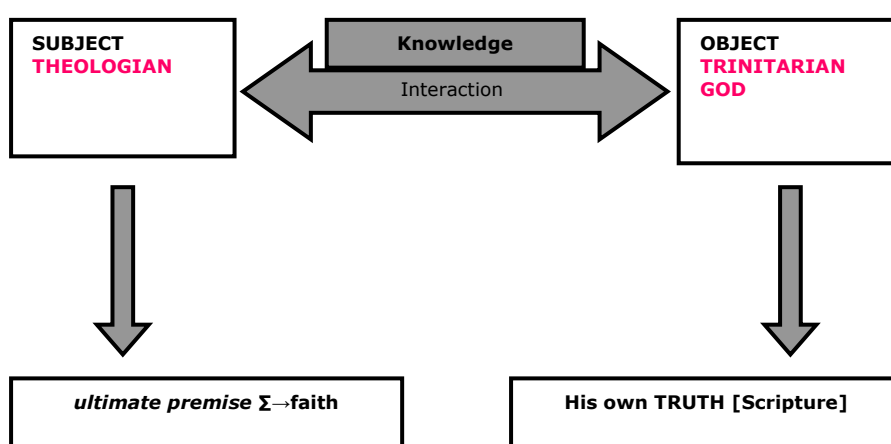


Figure 1. Epistemological Paradigm. Figure from *A Search for God*, (p. 37), by Zoltán Szallós-Farkas, 2010, Bucuresti: Editura Universitară.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 36.



the practical side of the relationship with God. This means that both aspects, that is, sound Christian theology and sound Christian spirituality, have to be integrated within the personal life of the theologian who is called to overcome and remove – via his teaching ministry and personal life – the dualistic “divide between doctrines and devotion, knowledge about God and knowledge of God, research and search for God, reason and experience, intellect and heart, soul and body, mind and matter, knowing and becoming, Subject and Object”.<sup>82</sup>

### **Preliminary Conclusion**

Following the arguments that have been presented so far, we can come to some conclusions that can help us to form an opinion about the present subject. In the first part of this chapter we analyzed Jon Dybdahl’s premises from which he began his study on spirituality. We could see both the strengths of his book, but we also discovered methodological errors. Although most of his premises are supported by the Bible, we see how a single false assumption can totally change the understanding of spirituality. The application of certain practices of Eastern religions in Christianity can lead us to a misperception of God and ignoring the authority of the Bible—which must provide the pillars upon which our spirituality is built.

In the second part of this chapter we identified the influences that contribute to and strengthen the ideology of the author, and the reasons why we should not allow these influences to penetrate Christianity. The analysis of the practices in Eastern religions revealed the ideologies behind these practices and the pantheistic doctrine that prevails in them. Emptying the mind, removing the thinking and detaching from this world are practices that contradict biblical principles. The thing that becomes

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 46.

obvious in Dybdahl's book is that the author does not want to be molded by the Bible, but yet he uses the text to sustain his opinions.

Liberal influences are also found in Dybdahl's book. These influences can be seen in the manner in which the author deals with worship music. The fact that he accepts any type of music in worship and considers any type of spirituality as beneficial in relation with divinity shows the misunderstanding that Dybdahl has of God. He applies a methodology in the study of spirituality oriented towards human needs rather than on glorifying God. The book *Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of Your Soul* presents important practices and spiritual disciplines for spiritual growth, emphasizing the need for a personal experience with the Creator, but totally neglecting the human need of knowing God.

In the last part of the chapter we presented the proper method of studying spirituality, emphasizing both the experimental and theoretical side of spirituality. The human desire for the divine must be nurtured to become spirituality.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE THEOLOGICAL AND EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF DYBDAHL'S SPIRITUALITY

#### **Introduction**

The concept of spirituality is eclectically understood today. Although many aspects of spirituality may be similar in form, in essence they have different ideologies and principles in some cultures. “In today’s postmodern, pluralistic world, with its multiple influences from Eastern non-Christian religions, animism, New Age and other philosophies, the meanings of concepts related to “spirituality” and “spiritual formation” have become “ambiguous and conflicted.”<sup>1</sup> The idea of spirituality is not “limited to the Christian religion and is in fact increasingly being used even beyond explicitly religious circles.”<sup>2</sup> Although it is in Christian theology that we find the roots of this term, today the concept is used outside this field and has a multitude of shades defined by certain non-biblical practices such as “breath prayer” or “yoga”. The statement by Andrews University on spirituality highlights how challenging it is that some words “used to convey biblically faithful meanings can also be used to convey biblically unacceptable meanings.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Andrews University, "A statement on Biblical spirituality," accessed. [https://www.andrews.edu/sem/sdats\\_bibspir.pdf](https://www.andrews.edu/sem/sdats_bibspir.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Sheldrake, *Spirituality and Theology*, 34.

<sup>3</sup> University, "A statement on Biblical spirituality."

In this chapter, we will try to analyze the biblical understanding of spirituality and to identify both the similarities and differences between the latter and the spirituality in Dybdahl's thought. We should reach a clearer understanding of Christian spirituality by contrasting the Biblical principles with other forms of spirituality.

### **Bible-based Spirituality and Culture**

One of the main problems with which biblical spirituality is confronted is that of cultural influences. Culture has an impact on man's understanding of spirituality and can influence his practices, lifestyle and relationship with God. The negative effects of culture in our religious life are inversely proportional to the importance of biblical principles for us. In an attempt to establish the relationship between Christ and culture, Richard Niebuhr is "particularly concerned with social ethics"<sup>4</sup>, and he concludes that there are several types of relationship between them: 1) Christ against Culture; 2) Christ above Culture; 3) Christ the transformer of culture.<sup>5</sup> When the culture and habits of a certain region contradict the biblical principles of spirituality, the subject (the man) has the option of allowing the culture to transform spirituality or to allow spirituality to transform the culture. The conflict between biblical spirituality and culture can be clarified either by placing culture above spirituality through compromise, or by placing biblical spirituality above culture through loyalty to biblical principles.

One of Jon Dybdahl's ideas is that cultural preferences must be accepted in spirituality because they can be tools through which God can reach man's heart.

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<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright, *The Study of Spirituality* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1986), 592.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Referring to cultural preferences in the music field, Dybdahl says that “musical tastes and preferences are always culturally and generationally influenced. What moves my children may not touch me and vice versa. Or what leads a Chinese toward God may not affect me and vice versa. We must be careful that our judgments do not rest solely on what we believe is the right way. God can use many types of vehicles for His truth.”<sup>6</sup>

The idea presented by Jon Dybdahl can bring a solution to the problems of Christianity today, but it can also dilute the importance of biblical principles.

In the first instance, adapting the Christian message means contextualization that helps our contemporaries. This is a very crucial and necessary subject. The gospel is considered by more and more people to be irrelevant nowadays, and therefore, believers need to take account of culture, age or gender. Often, Christianity becomes “so absorbed in abstract ideas that it loses touch with the living reality of God”<sup>7</sup> and the real needs of the people.

In the second instance, placing culture and the tendencies specific to the postmodern ethos above the principles of biblical spirituality can lead to instability and the loss of the genuine purpose of spirituality. The world is in a state of constant change, but to have an appealing spirituality we need a stable pillar. As we established at the beginning of this thesis, the foundations of an authentic spirituality are the three *solus/sola*: “*Solus Deus* (the only God), *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone) and *Sola Fide* (faith alone).”<sup>8</sup> The purpose of biblical spirituality is not to adapt the biblical

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<sup>6</sup> Dybdahl, *Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of Your Soul*, 28.

<sup>7</sup> Alister, *Christian Spirituality*, 31.

<sup>8</sup> For further study of the triple solus and their importance in the field of biblical spirituality, see Szallós-Farkas, *A Search for God- Understanding Apocalyptic Spirituality*, 48-56.

message and to transform God according to the wishes and tendencies of the people, but to remodel people according to Creator's will.

When Christ was on earth, He made the Gospel relevant to the people of those times, but without removing the biblical principles. Although He was the lawmaker, He was subordinate to the Scripture and placed it above His own will: "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill (Matthew 5:17)".

In order to have a better understanding about the idea of subordination of culture to God and Scripture, we will use the following example: nowadays, marriage has been re-defined to include same-sex partnership (marriage) besides the life-long commitment between a male and a female. More and more people are advocating for acceptance and integration into society of people adopting this lifestyle, and same-sex marriage is no longer seen as unnatural action, but as natural action. "Same-sex marriage is now legal in over 20 countries and its legalization is under discussion in several more."<sup>9</sup> The main question is "how should Christians relate to those persons?"<sup>10</sup> If we adopt the idea promoted by Jon Dybdahl to prioritize cultural trends, then, the church should accept those people as members of the Church because this is part of the current culture.

Today's society no longer considers traditional marriage to be contemporary just because it is simply "a Bible-based concept."<sup>11</sup> People argue that, if biblical

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<sup>9</sup> Bronwin Winter, *Global Perspectives on Same-Sex Marriage* (Paris, France: Springer International Publishing AG, 2018), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Ekkehardt Mueller, *Homosexuality, Scripture, and the Church* (Silver Spring, MI: Biblical Research Institute, 2010), 3.

<sup>11</sup> Nicholas P. Miller, "Should Adventist Care About Protecting Traditional Marriage?," in *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church*, ed. Nicholas P. Miller Roy E. Gane, and Peter H. Swanson (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2012), 215.

principles would influence state principles (the state is formed from both Christians and non-Christians), it “would violate the fundamental commitment to the separation of church and state.”<sup>12</sup> Our society draws a visible line between morality (biblical laws) and civic laws, claiming that the state “cannot legislate morality.”<sup>13</sup> But, can we separate morality from the law? If we look at the civic laws (against theft and rape, alcohol use in public places and prostitution are forbidden, etc.), we can see that all are connected to moral principles.

Contrary to the cultural and political tendencies, Bible presents marriage as a unique relationship between husband and wife who “were equally created in God’s image, although, sexually different”<sup>14</sup> according to Genesis 1:26-31. This biblical passage underlines the idea that the human being (male and female) is the image of God, and God’s command for them is to grow and multiply on the earth. This command clearly sets marriage limits, making it impossible “for one to engage in every kind of sexual misbehavior”<sup>15</sup>, including same-sex relationship, “adultery, bestiality, and pedophilia, without doing any harm to the imprint image of God.”<sup>16</sup>

The Bible strongly condemns same-sex relationship by saying in Leviticus 20:13 that “if a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>14</sup> Roberto Badenas, "Husband and Wife in Marriage: Issues on Gender Roles," in *Marriage: Biblical and Theological Aspects*, ed. Ekkehardt Mueller and Elias Brasil de Souza (Silver Spring, Maryland: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2015), 74.

<sup>15</sup> Robert A. J. Gagnon, "The Scriptural Case for a Male-Female Prerequisite for Sexual Relations: The New Testament Perspective," in *Homosexuality, Marriage, and the Church*, ed. Nicholas P. Miller Roy E. Gane, and Peter H. Swanson (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 2012), 65.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 66.

on their own heads (NIV).” In this context, the concept of biblical spirituality is compromised because the biblical principles are contrary to cultural tendencies (Scripture against culture). The Scripture emphasizes that “sexual intimacy belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman.”<sup>17</sup> This is also argued in the passage from Genesis 2:24, which says: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and become one flesh.” God instituted marriage in the Garden of Eden and blessed the union between man and woman. According to God’s principles, “the monogamous union in marriage of a man and a woman is the only morally appropriate locus of genital or related intimate sexual expression.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, we can affirm that intimate same-sex relationship is a “manifestation of disorder and brokenness in human inclination and relations caused by sin coming into the world.”<sup>19</sup>

Thus, although the Churches (especially SDA Church) “respect all people, whether heterosexuals or homosexuals, and acknowledge that all human beings are creatures of heavenly Father whom He loves,”<sup>20</sup> they cannot accept homosexual as members because this inclination is contrary to divine principles. The arguments presented above are also in contrast to the ideas promoted by Jon Dybdahl, and demonstrate that the church cannot allow cultural tendencies to influence biblical principles.

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<sup>17</sup> Mueller, *Homosexuality, Scripture, and the Church*, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 31.



Spirituality surpasses the desires of the flesh and places Divinity above it, which is the object of spirituality. Joseph Kidder emphasizes that the relationship between humanity and divinity has to be built on total *surrender* and *obedience*.<sup>21</sup> This idea is rooted in the Bible, where Paul defines the spiritual man (*pneumatikos*) as being transformed, influenced or led by the Holy Spirit (*pneuma*).<sup>22</sup> The influence of the Holy Spirit will be visible in the life of a spiritual man by the fact that he will bring “the fruit of the Holy Spirit” (*pneumatos*) which is love, peace, kindness, faithfulness, self-control. Bible-based spirituality shows us that the desires, all the actions and the whole being are obedient to God's desire, reaching to the point where Christ prevails over the whole person, as Paul says in the Galatians 2:20: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God.” We can conclude from Paul’s claim that natural or fleshly (*sarkinos*) desires are subordinated, or even removed by the influences of the Divinity in the life of a spiritual man (*pneumatikos*).

### **Bible-based Spirituality and Personal Temperament**

In the postmodern societies in which we live, spirituality is associated with different practices and customs promoted by Oriental religions and widespread in most of the cultures on earth. The term spirituality is commonly used by the postmodern man and understood by some people as a “pilgrimage inside of the soul”<sup>23</sup> that can be achieved by practicing certain spiritual exercises such as

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<sup>21</sup> Kidder, *Majesty- Experiencing Authentic Worship*, 31.

<sup>22</sup> Downey, *Understanding Christian Spirituality*, 60.

<sup>23</sup> Zoltán Szallós-Farkas, "Bazele teologice și antropologice ale spiritualității sexualității umane," *TR* 7 (2012): 79.

“meditation, yoga, mystical prayers or mantric verses.”<sup>24</sup> Although some people understand spirituality only as a practical activity that can help one relax or escape from everyday problems, there are others who understand spirituality only as a cognitive notion. Theologian Alister McGrath explains this to be a consequence of differences in personality.<sup>25</sup> The differences arise from the fact that some people are more emotional than others, and their spirituality is influenced by this. Personality differences make some people focus on experimenting and their “felt sense of God’s presence, and others focus on the great theological truths of the Scripture.”<sup>26</sup> This idea is also highlighted by the fact that “in general society about 60 percent of women and about 40 percent of men are feelers”<sup>27</sup> and this is also reflected in the church where “preliminary figures suggest that feelers outnumber thinkers three to one.”<sup>28</sup>

This point of view is used by Jon Dybdahl, to contend that personality differences make us perceive God differently. He talks about the influences of personality in spiritual life and claims that for “extroverts a silent retreat may be oppressive”<sup>29</sup> while for introverts it may be a blessing. Also Dybdahl divides believers into two categories: Feelers and Thinkers. In the spiritual realm, feelers identify themselves with the simple and practical elements of Scripture that motivate

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Alister, *Christian Spirituality*, 8-20.

<sup>26</sup> Evan B. Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: BrazosPress, 2008), 24.

<sup>27</sup> Dybdahl, *Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of Your Soul*, 113.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

them to find themselves in biblical occurrences and characters, while thinkers are more concerned with logic and with rigorous biblical passage analysis.

Differences in personality and temperament are a reality that cannot be challenged. But the main question is not whether we are different in terms of personality, but whether personality can influence our spirituality.

Spirituality is a pillar to which man must relate. It is rooted in the Word of God, and nothing must change its connotation from the principles found in the Word. Spirituality must influence human personality and not vice versa. The theologian and historian Gordon Wakefield affirms that “spirituality means the influences that consciously or unconsciously shape our actions and our personalities.”<sup>30</sup> Spirituality must change the believer's life and bring it closer to the Triune God to restore the connection that was broken by sin. If spirituality is based only on emotion, experiencing the divine presence becomes mysticism<sup>31</sup>, and should it focus only on the theoretical knowledge of God, then it becomes philosophy. There must be a balance between experimenting God and knowing Him, and this balance leads to an authentic spirituality.

The theologian Evan Howard affirms that doctrine (teaching about God) may not be the primary domain of spirituality, but “insofar as our view of God affects our actual relationship with God, doctrine begins to enter into the field of spirituality.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, we cannot let personal influences (behavior, personality, emotions, culture etc.)

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<sup>30</sup> Gordon S. Wakefield, "Anglican Spirituality," in *Christian Spirituality- Post Reformation and Modern*, ed. Louis Dupre and Don E. Saliers (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1989), 259.

<sup>31</sup> Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, 36.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

alter our spirituality. God has left Scripture as a pillar of spirituality, so that it remains authentic and not variable.

### **Bible-based Spirituality**

Bible-based spirituality integrates systematic theology and practical theology. In this way “doctrines and spirituality, that have been kept divorced”<sup>33</sup> both in academic contexts and personal lives, are brought together. Howard focuses on two dimensions of spirituality: descriptive and normative. The descriptive element that is defined by exploring the divine-human relationship, must be complemented by the normative element that represents the interest in the continuous development of this relationship.<sup>34</sup> “Spirituality refers to the integrative removal of the divide between the experience of faith and the intellectual reflection upon it.”<sup>35</sup> Christian spirituality is “the pursuit of a relationship between God and people.”<sup>36</sup> A relationship cannot be satisfied only by the fulfillment of practices, but it also involves theoretical knowledge. For this reason, we will further analyze spirituality from biblical perspective, following both the theoretical (academic) and the practical elements.

### **At the Level of Practice**

Spirituality is considered by most Christian theologians to be a way of life<sup>37</sup> characterized by love for people (Mat 19:19), obedience to the word of God (1 Pet 1:23), and by a closer relationship with Christ (Rom 8:10). By hearing the word of

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<sup>33</sup> Zoltán Szallós-Farkas, "The Doctrinal Matrix of SDA Spirituality," *TR* 5 (2010): 62.

<sup>34</sup> Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, 20.

<sup>35</sup> Szallós-Farkas, *A Search for God- Understanding Apocalyptic Spirituality*, 57.

<sup>36</sup> Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, 141.

<sup>37</sup> Szallós-Farkas, "Bazele teologice și antropologice ale spiritualității sexualității umane," 82.

God, man comes to believe in God, and then, under the influence of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13), he comes to be progressively transformed according to the pattern of the moral character of Christ,<sup>38</sup> the one witnessed by the Scriptures (John 5:39). The influence of the Holy Spirit affects the “multidimensional”<sup>39</sup> man, changing the mind, heart and soul (Mat 22:37).

The apostle Paul states that the result of the work of the Holy Spirit will be seen in all the practical aspects of a man’s life. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Gal. 5:22-23).

#### At the Level of Theological Knowledge

Although spirituality is defined today as the fulfillment of specific disciplines, exercises and practices, it also contains a theoretical side. Evan B. Howard defines spirituality as being on three levels: 1. at the level of practice; 2. at the level of dynamics; 3. at the level of academic discipline. He points out that spirituality, on the one hand is defined by the practical aspect of a relationship with God, but on the other hand it also represents “a way of understanding the dynamics of how relationship with God works and the investigation of the lived relationship or formulated teachings of the Christian church.”<sup>40</sup> According to this definition, spirituality is the experience that a man has with God as revealed in the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul states in the Epistle to Romans 10:17: “so that faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” This experience involves both faith (the practical aspect) and hearing the word

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, 29.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, 16.

(the theoretical aspect). Spirituality includes knowledge of the one true God and His Son, Jesus Christ, sent by Him (John 17:3) into the world. All these things can only be accomplished by the influence of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, authentic spirituality has its fundamental premise in the Triune God.

### **Preliminary Conclusions**

Based on the above discussion, we can conclude that spirituality that is rooted in the Scriptures can be defined as a way of life led by the Holy Spirit that unites us with Christ through the Word found in the Scriptures. Although, “the forms and trends in Christian spirituality point us to the diversity of relationship with God,”<sup>41</sup> we must remain firmly on the principles of biblical spirituality and unity in Christ. Bible-based spirituality cannot be influenced by culture or personal traits like inclination, emotions, personality etc. Christ must be above culture and personal influences, and He must be the one who transforms our personality and individuality, “that the man of God may be perfect (2 Tim 3:17, King James Version).” The process towards perfection is accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit, that transforms men’s thoughts and actions according to God’s will.

The foundation of Christian Spirituality can be summarized by the following statements:

”Bible-based spirituality is simply the holistic quality of human life, as it was meant to be at the center of which is our relationship with God.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>42</sup> Carol Tasker, *Spiritual Formation. Unexpected Surprises for Pastors, Theology* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2001), 16.

In this study, we have come to the conclusion that Bible-based spirituality must be based only on God's Word and has its roots "in the Trinitarian God"<sup>43</sup>. By experiencing Bible-based spirituality on all levels, we are able to delve into the complexities of relationship with our God, a relationship that is characterized by love.

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

Throughout time, the concept of spirituality has been studied and understood in different ways. This can be seen in the various types of spirituality that are present today. People are presented with a plethora of types of spirituality and they can choose between, for instance, different Christian spiritualities such as, Orthodox mysticism, Catholic mysticism, Pentecostal charismatic spirituality or occult oriental types of spirituality, Hindu, Buddhist, New Age, Tantra yoga-based spirituality etc.

In our thesis, we have analyzed several types of spirituality and noticed that the main difference between authentic, that is, biblical spirituality and the others, is the doctrines or the ideology behind them and the purpose with which they are practiced. We have seen in this work that the purpose of Christian spirituality is to fill “the mind, heart and soul” with the biblical God’s presence, while non-Christian spirituality is concerned with detaching the spirit from the body and clearing the mind. According to the Bible, spirituality does not separate *pneuma* from *sarx* (flesh) or *psyche* (soul/mind), concepts which are necessary in spirituality, but biblical spirituality condemns the action of bonding with them, and the neglecting of dependence on the Holy Spirit and the fruits that He produces in the life of the believer. Authentic spirituality involves a strong relationship with the Triune God and a powerful foundation in Scripture, elements that are essential in leading to the transformation of personal life –these two elements (Triune God and Scripture) must be the pillars on which we build our spirituality. Through careful research of the



Scriptures (the Revelation) we can reach God (John 5:39) because, as one of our fundamental presuppositions in this research project has stated, God has reached us via the text of Scriptures through which He engenders in the researcher the ultimate presupposition of sound theological research, namely, faith in the intelligibility and cognoscibility of the divine Object of one's research, that is, God.

Following the study of the term of spirituality from a biblical perspective, we have been able to compare the result of this research with Dybdahl's perspective on spirituality, after having analyzed his methodology and the premises upon which he based his study.

One of Dybdahl's premises is that any kind of spirituality is good. As a consequence, he allows practices from Eastern spirituality to penetrate into Christian spirituality. This action can lead us to a misperception of God and an ignorance of the authority of the Bible. The pantheistic doctrine that prevails in Eastern religions and its ideology promote practices that contradict biblical principles. Emptying the mind, eliminating thinking and detaching from this world are just a few of the practices. The author's openness to these practices denotes a tentative postmodern liberalism. Liberal influences can be seen also in the manner in which the author deals with worship music. He considers that any type of music can be beneficial in worship, as long as it produces a state of well-being. This might make a person vulnerable to unwanted influences coming from spiritual entities, the presence of whom might be invoked by biblically unsound spiritual exercises within the worship experience. Man thus can become the victim of biblically unsound spiritual disciplines through which they position themselves right at the center of worship. This principle is in complete opposition to biblical truth. Bible-based spirituality places God at the center of our worship and He becomes the object and purpose of our worship.

The Bible presents a holistic image of spirituality, emphasizing both the experimental and theoretical side of spirituality. It shows that a spiritual man is influenced and transformed by the Holy Spirit, and the effects of this influence and transformation are visible. As a result of the work of the Holy Spirit, man is “washed, sanctified and justified” (1 Cor. 6:11).

Based on the above, we can conclude that the spirituality that is founded on Biblical principles can be defined as a way of life, continuously influenced and transformed by the Holy Spirit that leads us to Christ through the Scripture. Bible-based spirituality places Christ above all things and impacts man’s life in all aspects. Spirituality is not a practice or a ritual. It is a process that is accomplished by knowing God through the Word (The Revelation) and through experiencing Him every day in our personal life. This is accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit that transforms our thoughts and actions according to God’s will.

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